

WASHINGTON, DC—The entire Oregon delegation and two Washington Congressmen, led by Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.), sent a letter yesterday to the House Interior Appropriations Subcommittee asking for \$15 million to preserve critical lands in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Blumenauer also testified before the Subcommittee in support of the funding.

“The Columbia River Gorge is of great significance nationally and within Oregon,” Blumenauer said in his testimony last week before the Subcommittee. “The Gorge is a national treasure and one of the most recognizable sites along the Lewis and Clark Trail.”

The House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Interior and Related Agencies is the congressional subcommittee charged with setting funding levels for all programs and projects within the Department of Interior, including the Fish and Wildlife Service and the National Park Service as well as the Forest Service within the Department of Agriculture. The Subcommittee is expected to begin consideration of the fiscal year 2004 Interior Appropriations bill shortly. The bill must be signed into law by September 30th of this year. A copy of the letter sent yesterday follows.

April 10, 2003

The Honorable Charles Taylor
Chairman
Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations
B-308 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515 The Honorable Norman Dicks
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Interior Appropriations

1016 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Taylor and Ranking Member Dicks:

We are writing to you today in strong support of a \$15 million request to preserve critical lands in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area under the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The Columbia River Gorge ranks as the most recognizable site along the Lewis & Clark trail, and we can think of no better way to commemorate the upcoming bicentennial of the Corps of Discovery's journey, beginning in 2003, than to protect the lands explored by Meriwether Lewis and William Clark.

The US Forest Service has a three-year window to purchase lands in the Gorge from willing sellers in order to protect them from development. An amendment to the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area Act in the FY 2001 Interior Appropriations bill created a need for greater acquisition of critical lands. As a result of this legislation, the Forest Service has received 184 land offers totaling over 6,800 acres.

In 2002, the Forest Service purchased almost 1000 acres from willing sellers, but there is much more work that needs to be done in the coming two years. The Forest Service has expressed the need for \$15 million of the 2004 fiscal year to acquire critical lands in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. While we understand the budget constraints your Subcommittee faces as we are preparing the FY 2004 budget, the clock is ticking away and our opportunity to preserve these critical lands could be lost forever. This appropriation will go far in supporting willing land seller and protecting this important national treasure.

Sincerely,

Earl Blumenauer, Greg Walden, Brian Baird, Peter DeFazio, David Wu, Darlene Hooley, Jim McDermott.